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Seafaring Style: Diving Into Yacht Interior Design

Here, the experts share how to make a yacht's below-deck interior design streamlined, safe and totally "see-worthy."

A yacht is a second home on the high seas, so you may as well enhance your investment by "decking" her out in style. However, it will take an accomplished specialized yacht interior designer to personalize your space while maximizing its constraints. Furthermore, it's also important to bolster your floating second home's foundation with function and a high level of safety, given that it is in the always-in-motion water.

"It's critical to start with an architectural design that suits your wants, passions and the person you are," says Theresa Rasmussen, who serves as the **Windstar Cruise Line's** marine hotel superintendent, and is responsible for ensuring the ships are designed to feel like private yachts while retaining strict safety standards.

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"Once you have your canvas, the design elements should spin into the thread that weaves it all together, from floor plan and furnishings, to fabrics and finishing. Regardless of the size of your craft, beautiful and functional vessels should be well thought-out and planned with somebody you trust."

Rasmussen suggests first surveying your lifestyle and thinking about how you want to use each space on the yacht. For example, will your yacht be used primarily for entertaining friends or traveling with young children? "Knowing how you will use your boat will greatly impact the overall design," she says.



Design decisions will also be affected by the climate where you dock, and if you sail in warm water versus cold water. This lends itself to whole, all-encompassing cabin design trends for consideration, whether your taste tends towards bright, tropical and breezy, sleek and urbane, or cozy.

Of course, the confined space of a boat makes all design decisions that much more challenging. “A smart designer with maritime experience, and who knows the industry, can help you to consider where functionality can lend itself to an open concept,” says Rasmussen. “It’s really about mapping out your concept in advance and being focused on what activities you expect to do in each of the spaces.”



Like Rasmussen, Michael Merritt, CEO of Ohio-based **Merritt Woodwork** observes that burl veneer, gold accents, and traditional nautical appointments and motifs are on the decline among his yacht clients, while simplicity and clean lines are on the rise. “Designs are now leaning towards overtones of Asian and Zen-like details,” he says. “Warm and inviting designs are trending, and we’re seeing judicious use of specialty finishes and occasional aspects of glamour that won’t overpower the interior of the boat.”

How interior space is used, meanwhile, oftentimes mimics what would be found in a yacht owner’s home on land, according to Merritt. While the boat interior needs the basic formatting of accommodations for the owner and guest, themed rooms and specific-function rooms are the norm today. Beauty salons, spas, steam rooms, saunas, an underwater observation deck, theater room, and even cellars for wine and whiskey collections are just some examples. The lifestyle aspect also runs through to the outdoor decks, as does the use of more contemporary materials.



“Outdoor spaces continue to move to the use of alternative and, at times, unconventional materials and surfaces,” says Merritt. “Where wood was once the norm, today we find extensive use of resins, stone, composites, carbon fiber, decorative glass and metal. While the color palette continues to be off-white or some shades of beige or gray, we do see the occasional loud pop of color.”



This fall, Miami-based **MidnightExpress** launches a new **60-foot model** yacht with the largest center console in the world. CEO Eric Glaser affirms the original objective was to create a sport boat with yacht-inspired cabin that screams, “This is the future.” Although this yacht is built for sport and speed, its interiors (incorporating two master suites, a full couch, and galley) are conceptualized by Italian designer and naval architect **Giuseppina Arena** to be a luxury living space in the truest sense. Every boat begins as a “light gray canvas” that she and the client can customize, from accent colors and electronics down to the seat placement and upholstery stitching.

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“Our 60-foot Pied-a-Mer yacht is a perfect canvas to introduce new types of surfaces, veneers, wallpapers, wood flooring, indoor-outdoor fabrics and paint colors for continuity between the cabin and exterior of the boat,” details Glaser.

“Customized models may include stone countertops in the galley hollowed out and reinforced with honeycomb, digital blackout windows, and adjustable LED lighting. High-gloss, shiny wood finishes are out, as is use of teak and other dark woods except as accents.”



Glaser points out another distinctive design feature that taps into the trend leaning towards the feel of more open space: Putting as many windows as possible (23) so they meld into the structural lines of the boat, cutting the glass in such a way that most of the wall space is window. Better still, the owner can hit a switch to darken the room at night rather than using blinds.

Safety always informs the interior and exterior of a boat's design. According to Rasmussen, ships have the second-highest regulations for fire protection after aircraft, as a ship itself is an escape route. All fabrics and carpets should ideally pass IMO (International Maritime Organization) regulations.

Merritt, meanwhile, points out that safety is critical in yacht builds and various codes, and registries and classifications need to be met. Safety devices such as horns and sensors, while visually disturbing, can artfully be recessed or hidden to keep the canvas clear of strong obstructions. Watertight doors are also key safety features that can readily be blended into the landscape of the interior. The main staircase is not only a requirement to connect the upper and lower decks, but can be a design centerpiece of a vessel.

Although not designers, Sean Blue (Global Head of Watercraft) and Carl Lessard (Yacht Loss Prevention Specialist) of **AIG**, one of the largest insurers of yachts and mega yachts, are up on many of the latest boat design trends out of necessity. They are equipped to advise high net-worth clients on how to protect and outfit their floating assets.



“We see a variety of tastes, ranging from minimalist layouts to more classical yacht styles, and we also see more integrated tech elements such as video panels and smart wireless features that can change the room to your liking, from music to temperature as well as automation to control the various functions of the yacht,” says Blue, who cites boat builders **Ferretti** and **Azimut** for being ahead of the design curve. “Implementation of additional windows, as building techniques become a little more sophisticated, are becoming much more common; including bringing windows closer to the yacht’s waterline to let light into spaces down below.”

As far as prized possessions like artwork, the recommendation is to leave them on dry land. “It may make sense to have a reproduction of a favorite piece on the boat, and keep the priceless original version back on land,” Lessard says. “One growing trend I have noticed is having a masterpiece the client owns reproduced. Polaroid came out with a technology about 15 years ago that can reproduce a painting down to the smallest strokes and cracks. For those who bring the real pieces on board, security (from theft) is an issue, as is damage from water and fire.”

